Testimony of

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Labor and Public Employees Committee

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Good afternoon Representative Porter, Senator Gomes, Senator Miner and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. I am Lori Pelletier and I am proud to serve as President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO on behalf over 900 affiliated local unions who represent more than 220,000 working men and women in every city and town of our great state. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the following:

HB 5151 An Act Concerning Timetables for Municipal Binding Arbitration

We urge you to reject this unnecessary legislation.

Enacted in the 1970s after several teacher bargaining units went on strike and several municipal negotiations went on for multiple years without reaching resolution, municipal binding arbitration is an effective mechanism to peacefully resolve labor and management disputes while maintaining the delivery of public services. It replaced public employees' right to strike and appropriately balances the interests of taxpayers, communities and employees.

Both the Municipal Employee Relations Act (MERA) and the Teachers' Negotiation Act (TNA) provide for binding arbitration. Though their timelines differ, both MERA and TNA arbitration proceedings provide sufficient flexibility for both parties without causing significant costs or delays.

Both TNA and MERA have been amended over the last thirty years. All of those changes have benefited management, including modifications that rendered binding arbitration to be non-binding for the employer. Both TNA and MERA allow for rejection of an award by the local legislative body, but the union is not permitted to strike or reject an award. Both Acts would be made essentially unworkable if further changes were made to advantage management.

Instead of pursing legislation that would compromise the integrity and credibility of the binding arbitration process, we suggest the committee instead focus on ways to ensure that an adequate number of arbitrators are available to prevent scheduling delays.

In addition, municipal advocates have repeatedly and erroneously claimed that the binding arbitration itself is an expensive process. The reality is that municipal officials have often chosen expensive methods on their side of the table. Rather than directly negotiate contracts with their employees, they hire high-priced outside law firms that charge hundreds of dollars per hour and have a financial interest in declaring impasse and moving to arbitration. Chief elected officials, superintendents and town managers could avoid delays, exorbitant legal bills and

taxpayer dissatisfaction if they participated in collective bargaining instead of outsourcing their responsibilities.

HB 5210 An Act Concerning Various Pay Equity and Fairness Matters

We support this legislation and all efforts to eliminate gender-based pay inequity. On average, Connecticut women are paid 83 cents for every dollar a male worker is paid. The disparity is even greater for women of color. That's a significant loss for each woman, but businesses and our economy also suffer greatly. Lost wages mean less consumer buying power, which drives economic growth.

Women in unions working under negotiated collective bargaining agreements are more likely to be paid higher, fairer wages and have better access to health insurance and pensions. More must be done to afford those same protections to non-union female workers. We urge the committee to strengthen this bill in the following ways:

- Providing standards for "good faith self-evaluation" in lines 9-10
- Defining "reasonable progress" in line 11
- Substituting "protect" in line 12 with "prohibit"
- Strengthening the capacity of the Department of Labor to enforce the provisions of this bill and stop employer wage theft

HB 5284 An Act Concerning Drug and Alcohol Testing of An Employee

We urge you to reject this legislation. The Department of Labor has already adopted regulations to specify circumstances that may constitute reasonable suspicion, but it does not preclude the employer from citing additional circumstances. Because this issue has already been addressed by the Department of Labor, there is no need for this legislation

HB 5286 An Act Concerning Overtime Pay Exemptions for Highly Compensated Employees

We urge you to reject this legislation. So-called "highly compensated" employees are currently excluded from overtime pay under federal law, not state law. State law appropriately ensures they are compensated for the work they perform.

According to The Economic Policy Institute, wage stagnation over the last several decades was not the result of poor economic performance alone. Rather, wages were intentionally suppressed, through policy changes, by those with the most income, wealth, and power. HB 5286 appears to be such an attempt. As our economy grows, workers still do not enjoy the benefits the prosperity they have helped create. For that reason, we should not embrace any attempt to lower wages for any class of worker when wealth continues to be accrued disproportionately to the wealthiest one percent of the nation.

HB 5376 An Act Concerning Reevaluation of the Amount of Medical and Prescription Drug Copays Paid by State Employees

We urge you to reject this legislation. By statute, the 32 state employee bargaining units constituting the State Employee Bargaining Agent Coalition (SEBAC) negotiate pension and healthcare benefits with the Executive Branch. The General Assembly is not a party to those

negotiations, nor does it have the authority to determine medical or prescription drug benefits or plan designs for state employees. The current pension and healthcare agreement remains in effect until June 30, 2022. This bill would undermine collective bargaining rights and disregard SEBAC's decades-long bargaining history on these issues.